

The Function of Memory in Kazuo Ishiguro's
*An Artist of the Floating World and The Remains
of the Day*

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I. Introduction

Kazuo Ishiguro is a contemporary Japanese-born British novelist. He was born on November 8th, 1954, in Nagasaki, and immigrated to England with his family in 1960. To date, his novels have been translated into more than thirty languages. Kazuo Ishiguro claims that he is an “international writer,” fascinated with writing a “global novel” (Shaffer and Wong 25). The settings of his novels are used as “metaphors” to express his concerns about universal human reactions under a specific background rather than his concerns about the historical events themselves. He consistently maintains that “this [i.e. what he writes about in his novels set in Japan] isn’t something peculiar to Japan. . . . I’m inviting Western readers to look at this not as a Japanese phenomenon but as a human phenomenon” (Shaffer and Wong 10).

In Kazuo Ishiguro’s novels, “memory” is a recurrent motif. He explains that “I’m trying to capture the texture of memory. I need to keep reminding people that the flashbacks aren’t just a clinical, technical means of conveying things that happened in the past. This is somebody turning over certain memories, in the light of his current emotional condition” (Shaffer and Wong 48). However, it seems that the characters’ memories are not always accurate in Kazuo Ishiguro’s novels, so that some critics regard these characters as unreliable narrators. I prefer instead to believe that the

unreliability of memory is simply the way memory works so as to help people face their lives when they are unable to face them directly.

In this paper I will focus on Kazuo Ishiguro's second and third novels: *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*. I think these two novels are mostly similar, though the latter breaks away from Japanese settings and themes, and centers on an English butler. Ishiguro says he dislikes being defined as a "Japanese" writer just because of his Japanese face and name. He explains that in his earliest two novels he "just invent[ed] a Japan which served [his] needs. And [he] put that Japan together out of little scraps, out of memories, out of speculation, out of imagination" (Shaffer and Wong 8-9). As is the case with Ishiguro's "Japan," the "England" he describes in *The Remains of the Day* is also a kind of metaphor. He asserts that "the butler is a good metaphor for the relationship of very ordinary, small people to power" (Shaffer and Wong 37). He just uses "British history or Japanese history to illustrate something that was preoccupying [him]. . . [he] could just use it to serve [his] own personal purposes" (Shaffer and Wong 58). So in this aspect there are no essential differences between the backgrounds of these two novels, and the meaning of a shift to England might indicate Ishiguro's inclination to rid himself of the confinements of his ethnicity, thereby becoming more universal. In addition, both *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day* sustain Ishiguro's early mode; they employ first-person narrators, and the settings are, again, generally around the war period. As he says: "I tend to be attracted to pre-war and post-war settings because I'm interested in this business of values and ideals being tested, and people having to face up to the notion that their ideals weren't quite what they thought they were before the

test came” (Shaffer and Wong 36). And these two novels concern middle-aged men who intended to make a contribution to the nation or the world during the war period, but who have wasted their talents and efforts. *An Artist of the Floating World* tells the story of a Japanese painter, Ono, who advocated militarism during the war period, but ended up a nobody after the war. He finally confesses his mistakes because of his younger daughter Noriko’s marriage. By recalling the past, Ono exhibits the processes whereby he and others change as time goes by. In *The Remains of the Day*, through remembering the past, an English butler, Stevens, gradually comes to understand that, as the wheel of time goes forward, the old “world center”—the noble family and the standard of “dignity,” to which he had sacrificed his family and personal love—would not exist forever. So for Ono and Stevens, it is necessary to go back occasionally to re-examine old beliefs after having reached some achievements or failures, since everything changes as time flies by, and there is no permanent greatness, no eternal standard of values.

II. Review of Previous Studies

Several critics have discussed the topic of memory in Ishiguro’s novels. Approaching *The Remains of the Day*, L. R. Furst talks about “memory’s fragile power” by examining seven flaws in Stevens’s (the narrator’s) memory. John J. Su argues “for nostalgia as essential in reenvisioning ‘what constitutes genuine Englishness’” (Beedham 89). In addition to what he says of Stevens’s nostalgia, Su claims that “The image of the people collected together on the pier” at the end of the novel—“There are people of all ages strolling around this pier: families with children;

couples, young and elderly, walking arm in arm . . ." (*RD* 244-5)—represents "an imagined national community" which "England's future" "requires embracing" (Beedham 93). In short, Su examines the functions of both the individual's and the community's nostalgia in refiguring the English national character. Still, he may neglect memory's effect on the individual's quest for identity. Lang argues that Kazuo Ishiguro's novels properly belong to the genre of the historical novel, which concerns "the ordinary, the mundane, the marginalized, the dispossessed" (Lang 147). He also takes note of conflicts and gaps between Stevens's private memory and public historical records. And Lang points out that "only in private memory" can we "resist the perception of the past as a static and determined field" (Lang 164); this is contrary to the doctrines of public history (Lang 155-6) but consistent with Kazuo Ishiguro's concept of "the texture of memory" (Lang 164). Lang analyses the relationship between public history and private memory from a historical perspective. But in addition to addressing the functions of the narrator's individual memory, I will also focus on the shared collective memory among the other fictional characters in the novels, which is not as stable as the historical records.

Yugin Teo analyzes forgetting, remembering, and release in Kazuo Ishiguro's novels in his *Kazuo Ishiguro and Memory*. Teo draws on French philosopher Paul Ricoeur's theories, as laid out in his *Memory, History, Forgetting*. As for "forgetting" in *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*, Teo highlights the "sense of absence" (Teo 29) in Stevens's public and private life. Stevens always, argues Teo, keeps himself in "shadow" (Teo 30). And this sense of absence in individual memory results in a kind of "frustration" (Teo 34) for the reader. In addition, Teo

argues that “individual forgetting” (Teo 56) constitutes a “collective denial” (*ibid.*), demonstrating “the ability of Ishiguro’s fiction to blur the line between individual and collective loss through the depiction of ruptures in time and involuntary memory” (Teo 59). In *The Remains of the Day*, Teo examines Stevens’s individual mourning and “English national mourning” (Teo 58) for a “lost era” (*ibid.*). Still, Teo neglects the forgetful and changeable features of collective memory, and neglects also situations in which individual memory is gradually separated from collective memory as time goes by. As for “remembering,” Teo believes that Ono does not “completely let go of his former self” (Teo 97), for he has never changed “his attitude regarding his involvement in Japan’s imperialist campaigns” (*ibid.*). Ono’s memory of his former glory and career becomes the sole witness to his “individual histories” (Teo 99), and if he lets that go, “no one else will” (*ibid.*) remember him. I think that indeed Ono does not completely let go of his former life. However, it is not because he never admits his mistakes, but because he returns to his natural identity—as a father, a painter, an ordinary Japanese man in the world of the present—which had existed in his life all along, even when hidden by his ambitions. And I prefer to believe that Ono actually realizes the mistakes he has made, and the talents he has wasted, in the past. His daughter’s marriage gives him an opportunity to confess all of that. Teo also examines Su’s account of a unique “utopian dimension to nostalgia” (Teo 118) in *An Artist of the Floating World*, which “does not turn towards the future but to an idealized past” (*ibid.*). Teo’s systematic analysis of the forgetting, remembering and “release” of memory in Kazuo Ishiguro’s novels fails to examine the positive and active functions of the individual’s memory in *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of*

the Day.

In short, Teo neglects the positive functions of these two narrators' memories; so does Wojciech Drag. Drag claims that there is "presence" (Drag 36) and "wholeness" (Drag 37) in the past but "absence" (Drag 36) and hollowness in the present, in Ono's and Stevens's recollections. They are just immersed in nostalgia for their past glories or professional achievements. Furthermore, their confessions lack "sincerity" (Drag 81), sounding like "pseudo-confession[s]" (Drag 79). However, Drag's opinions seem a little too pessimistic. He notices only the negative reactions of the narrators to the changing environment, neglecting the fact that it is the *act* of recollection that enables the narrators to see the real outside world, and to reclaim even helps them to find back their real authentic and original selves. Similarly, though Mike Petry notices the changes between the past and the present in *The Remains of the Day*: like "Farraday," he says, "stands for change and the present, while Miss Kenton stands for tradition and the past" (Petry 99). Still, he believes that Stevens totally loses himself in the past, and that his purpose in practicing banter is only to "surprise Farraday" (Petry 118). Petry fails to realize that Stevens recovers his humanity, including his love for Kenton and his father along. His journey into the past means a lot to his present life—to his being a real genuine person living in the present, as against one lost in the past. But as "a small one," he is unable to change the history: the new American master replaces the old one. So why not regard his acceptance of a new, bantering, familiar style, as a first step toward seeking the human warmth which he had rejected for so long, and as a way to live a new life at the same time?

In a word, the above-mentioned studies tend to be negative towards Ono's and

Stevens's recollections, neglecting the positive functions of their individual memories. And none of these critics pay attention to the other fictional characters' memories in the novels, let alone the changing relationship between collective memory and individual memory, and the readers' role in understanding the narrators' past, present, and future. So, in this paper I intend to examine, in these two novels, the functions of collective memory and of individual memory—as well as the reader's experience—the better to show how memory plays an important role both within and outside Kazuo Ishiguro's novels. I aim also to illuminate Kazuo Ishiguro's reflections upon the human condition, and upon how we evaluate our lives, or save ourselves, in a world in which nothing is eternal, fixed or stable.

III. Collective Memory: Forget and Change

For my purposes, “collective memory” refers to the shared memory of characters other than the narrators of the novels. Maurice Halbwachs shows that collective memory “is not a given but rather a socially constructed notion . . . It is, of course, individuals who remember, not groups or institutions, but these individuals, being located in a specific group context, draw on that context to remember or recreate the past” (Halbwachs 22). “In collective memory the past is not preserved but is reconstructed on the basis of the present” (Halbwachs 40). So the individuals in the same social groups constitute a unified memory shared by all the members, and such a collective memory will be reconstructed according to present conditions. On the other hand, “individual memory,” for my purposes, refers to the narrator's memory, namely Ono's and Stevens's memory, which is not shared by the other characters.

In *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The Remains of the Day*, the other characters' "collective memory" typically forgets, so to speak; and it changes the characters' attitudes towards the standards or beliefs to which they once adhered. In *An Artist of the Floating World*—and unlike Ono, who is stuck in a Japanese tradition—the younger generation seems to choose to forget their memories of the past. Ono remembers that "members of my [Ono's] family, and particular my two daughters, had always been fond of passing time sitting there [on the veranda in their house], chatting and viewing the garden" (*AFW* 12); and in about 1948, when his married, eldest daughter Setsuko came back, his "two daughters spent a lot of their time out there as of old. I [Ono] often joined them, and at times it was almost as it had been years ago, when on a sunny day the family would sit there together exchanging relaxed, often vacuous talk" (*AFW* 13). So we can see that Ono's two daughters are quite attached to their old house, which is a traditional Japanese-style one. And when Sachiko notices the damage to the house wrought by the war, she seems very "saddened" (*AFW* 12). However, after the war, as American or Western culture starts gradually to affect Japan, the young Japanese generation begins to shed their old traditions. Take Noriko for instance: after she gets married and moves out of Ono's old house, she is quite "proud of her new apartment, and is forever extolling its 'modern' qualities. It is, apparently, very easy to keep clean, and the ventilation [is] most effective; in particular, the kitchens and bathrooms throughout the block are [of] Western design, so my daughter [Etsuko] assures me, infinitely more practical than, say, the arrangements in my [Ono's] own house" (*AFW* 156). In addition, Ono's sons-in-law Suichi and Taro prefer American democracy and education. Suichi declares

that "it's better he [his son Ichiro] likes cowboys than that he idolize people like Miyamoto Musashi . . . the American heroes are the better models for children now" (*AFW* 36). Ono's grandson Ichiro is addicted to American popular culture; he knows nothing of the traditional Japanese images engraved in Ono's mind, such as "Lord Yoshitsune . . . A samurai warrior . . . or the Ninja of the Wind" (*AFW* 30). Ichiro is always mimicking the Lone Ranger, the Hollywood film star Humphrey Bogart, and the American cartoon character Popeye. However, Ono wonders whether, under the prosperous surface, some good things are not "being thrown out with the bad" (*AFW* 185).

The characters who share a collective memory not only choose to rid themselves of tradition; sometimes they are unable even to recall their own words. Ono's elder daughter Setsuko seems to have forgotten her advice about "precautionary steps" (*AFW* 49) to Ono, which leads to his confession at Noriko's *miai*. When Ono tells Setsuko that he has acknowledged his mistakes in the war period as she suggests he do, she still pleads ignorance: "I'm sorry, I'm not at all clear what Father is referring to . . . I don't recall offering any advice last year" (*AFW* 191). And Setsuko continues to say that "Noriko told me she was extremely puzzled by Father's behaviour that night [i.e. Ono's admission of his mistakes at Noriko's *miai*]. It seems the Saitos [the other party to the *miai*] were equally puzzled. No one was at all sure what Father meant by it all. Indeed, Suichi also expressed his bewilderment when I read him Noriko's letter" (*ibid.*). So Setsuko refuses to recollect that episode, just as do the other people around Ono, such as his younger daughter Noriko, his son-in law Suichi, and the Saitos; though they've actually expressed criticism of Ono, directly or indirectly, it is as if

they have been totally deprived of any memory of it.

The amnesia of collective memory not only happens within the family, but also in the whole society. Shintaro, Ono's former student, who had admired Ono ardently during the war, is eager to cut his ties to his former teacher once it ends. And the people who had encouraged and taught the idiot boy, Hirayama, military songs during the war beat him after the war because he keeps singing them. Ono recalled that "nobody minded idiot in those days. What has come over people that they feel inclined to beat the man up? They may not like his songs and speeches, but in all likelihood they are the same people who once patted his head and encouraged him until those few snatches embedded themselves in his brain" (*AFW* 61). People seem to have forgotten that what they dislike now is what they had formerly been fanatic about, and the hatred they now hold is the bitter fruit they had sown in the past.

In *The Remains of The Day*, the definition of dignity in English society changes. First, there is the definition embodied in emotional restraint and professionalism, and in being "attached to a distinguished household" (*RD* 32); the butler wears a decent gentleman's suit which "he will not let ruffians or circumstance tear off him in the public gaze" (*RD* 43). Then we have a new definition of dignity in the post-war era, which holds that "dignity isn't just something gentlemen have. Dignity's something every man and woman in this country can strive for and get" (*RD* 185-6). Dignity now means not being a "slave," but being "free" (*RD* 186). These two definitions seem contradictory, but it is not necessary to judge which one is definitely right or wrong, since there is no stable standard for values. As Ishiguro says, "the values of society are always in flux" (Beedham 42). Only time may give us an answer.

Changes in the collective memory of society occasion suffering in those old butlers', whether these changes are reflected in anecdotes relayed after the war, or even after the butlers have died. Stevens asks at the beginning of the novel: "How often have you known it for the butler who is on everyone's lips one day as the greatest of his generation to be proved demonstrably within a few years to have been nothing of the sort?" (*RD* 30). Similar in this regard to Ono, butlers such as Stevens are also forgotten in the collective memory, whether consciously or subconsciously. But unlike Ono, who insists on arguing with others and on reminding them of what they have to let go, Stevens is only able to unburden himself of such overwhelming feelings to the unknown or imagined "you," making his situation seem more desolate.

According to Halbwachs, "the greatest number of memories come back to us when our parents, our friends, or other persons recall them to us . . . Most frequently, we appeal to our memory only in order to answer questions which others have asked us, or that we suppose they could have asked" (Halbwachs 38). Just as Ono begins his recollections when he realizes the possible difficulties and questions he might be faced with at Noriko's *miai*, Stevens begins to do so when he is reminded by others, such as his new master, his beloved Kenton, or by the great landscapes or the passers-by he encounters along his journey. So the collective memory and the individual memory are brought close together, and changes in collective memory provoke the protagonists into rethinking their past, present, and future. The individual memory depends on the collective one, and is understood through the group context, as Halbwachs suggests; however, if the individual's memory is not always consistent with the changing and forgetful collective memory, then it will not be shared by

others, and turns out to be a unique, isolated and unshared one.

Ono belonged to groups, such as the family in whose embrace he had enjoyed happy hours in the past; he belonged to the organizations and associations that militarism entailed; he belonged also to the larger community of Japanese who had lost their loved ones in the war. Ono loses his sense of belonging to these groups, as time passes. He does not change his opinions about tradition and values as his childrens' families do; nor does he commit suicide to offer an apology as some former celebrities do, like the composer Yukio Naguchi; nor does he hold on to hatred towards men like himself, as many other Japanese do. And Stevens is in the same situation as Ono. He had a family before, holding the same belief about professionalism his father had held; he shared English society's ideal of the butler as embodying the very definition of dignity, which required emotional restraint. But after the war, Stevens loses his family; and the definition of dignity and the social status of the butler so alter, after the war, as to be almost unrecognizable to Stevens. Even though Ono and Stevens do not share their memories with others, still their individual memories affect them positively, affording them hope for the future.

IV. Individual Memory

A. Helping Narrators Re-find the Lost

Against the background of a forgetful and changing collective memory, individual memory—namely, the narrator's memory—helps, above all, to relocate what's been lost. In their memories, Ono and Stevens tell themselves that they used to be figures of some importance, who had made contributions to world affairs; for

example, Ono thought he had served his nation well during the war by drawing pictures reflecting militarism, and by giving up the pursuit of capturing the transient beauty of the floating world. Through his recollections, Ono always stresses how successful he had been. But as the conflicts between memories of the past and the harsh reality of the present become ever more obvious, Ono realizes that he's just an ordinary man, as Matsuda says: "It's just that in the end we turned out to be ordinary men. Ordinary men with no special gifts of insights. It was simply our misfortune to have been ordinary men during such times" (*AFW* 200).

Furthermore, Ono reclaims his identity as a father, as he recalls the past. In his recollection, we may find that Ono is obsessed with his so-called glorious career in the past, seldom mentioning his wife, son, and daughters. But Noriko's marriage negotiation urges him to transfer his attention back to his family. So Ono begins his memory with Kuroda, his former student, who is arrested and imprisoned because of Ono's zealous militarism. And examining Kuroda's situation leads Ono to re-examine his own responsibility as a father, which he has neglected for so long. In order to compensate for his neglect, he says: "It was, in any case, my duty as a father to press on with the matter, unpleasant though it was . . ." (*AFW* 114). Ono might not have admitted his mistakes in public, since he always stresses that he just did what he thought it right to do. However, he declares at Noriko's *miai*: "I freely admit I made many mistakes" (*AFW* 123). So Ono plays the role of father, sacrificing the dignity he cherishes most for sake of his family. But it is a pity that his family does not acknowledge but instead just denies Ono's efforts.

However, in my opinion, in both *An Artist of the Floating World* and *The*

Remains of the Day, by using a memory which blends the past with the present, Kazuo Ishiguro puts the readers in such a position as to have an omniscient viewpoint: namely the author leads the readers to know nearly everything about the characters through the use of a “memory” that manifests, and even contrasts, their past and present thoughts and behaviors. So, readers may judge the characters’ past by the present outcome. And readers are equipped not only with “hindsight” of the kind studied by Lang and Teo, but also with the ability to examine the characters’ present situation through past points of view so as to make out what has “remained,” or why the characters end up as they do. During this process, the author is, in a sense, absent (owing to the use of first-person narration). He leaves the characters to narrate their own stories, without adding any of his own opinions or judgements, so that the characters’ emotions seem to be more sincere; they never strike the reader as the author’s puppets. But can the author totally vanish from this stage? Obviously he cannot. The author supplies the stage, brings together the characters and the readers, and leaves such clues as “memory” to help the readers delve into the characters’ minds. Then as soon as he finishes the writing, he “dies” (so to speak). The reader begins a dialogue (of sorts) with the characters, taking in what they did and how they thought in the past. The characters’ memories make it possible for the reader to understand *why* they choose to do what they do in the present; their memories keep what has happened in the past *present* to the mind. The reader is able to step outside the temporal process. He or she is not simply strung along by the characters’ narration. The reader constructs a complete causal relationship and traces out the truth by moving back and forth in the characters’ memories, to better know the characters’ past, present, and

maybe even their likely future. The reader is also able to understand the choices the characters make, which might otherwise seem irrational or ridiculous. So the characters' memories and stories will be shared with the omniscient readers through Kazuo Ishiguro's narrative technique.

We already know that in *An Artist of the Floating World* the other characters' memories change and sometimes forget the past, and what Ono has done for his family. So it is the readers, not the other characters, who are able to share Ono's memories and his endeavors for his family.

The emotional impact brought by memory therefore helps Ono better understand his own identity, and in this he resembles Stevens. As Stevens remembers his past as a butler in Darlington Hall, he begins to feel that he is always at a distance from the more consequential decisions made by Lord Darlington or the powers represented by the nobility. When Stevens mentions the conference held at the Hall, and Mr Spencer asks his opinion about the current political and economic situation, Stevens only recalls that he replied with one sentence and repeated it three times: "I'm very sorry, sir, but I am unable to be of assistance on this matter" (*RD* 195). Actually, Stevens is a "mute," when it comes to world affairs, never being "close to the hub of this world's wheel" (*RD* 126), through which he believed he was able "to [serve] humanity" (*RD* 117).

Besides realizing that he is a small man in a vast world, Stevens also reclaims the humanity he had lost so long ago. It seems that nearly all of Stevens's narration concerns his past career as a butler, during which he attended to "international affairs more than domestic ones" (*RD* 187) by serving Lord Darlington. However, if we read

between the lines, it is easy to see that Stevens rediscovers his human ties to his loved ones. He recalls that he seemed to have been “crying” (*RD* 105) on the day his father died but hid his sadness with a “laugh” and “quickly wiped [his] face” (*ibid.*). He remembers that he “had been preoccupied for some hours with the matter of Miss Kenton’s sorrow [i.e., her aunt’s death], having given particular thought to the question of ‘what I might best do or say to ease her burden a little’” (*RD* 177). So, by recalling the past, Stevens suddenly knows that in the deepest part of his heart (or subconsciously), he cared not only about those “great affairs” (*RD* 188), but also about other people, although he had not realized it at the time. He made use of his work and of another pretended “laugh” (*RD* 177) to conceal his true feelings, which he did not know how to express. Finally, when Stevens meets Kenton on the last day of his journey, he confesses that his heart is “breaking” (*RD* 239). So, in spite of Teo’s opinions that this scene illustrates Stevens’s “fragmented view of past” (Teo 34) and his inclination to keep himself in the “shadow,” I think it is the author’s intention to enable readers to unveil Stevens’s true heart through his apparently “fragmented” memory, for sometimes “silence is more eloquent than words” (Lewis 43). So, readers gradually find out that Stevens was not as indifferent as he himself or others thought. Through memory he rediscovers his basic human emotions toward family and love, but, in contrast to Ono, he can never compensate for what he has lost, which makes his story more tragic.

B. Let Narrators Be Loyal to Truth

Second, private memory allows the narrator to be loyal to truth. In Ono’s diary-like narration, the past and the present are laid side by side. By comparing the two,

Ono understands that what he had been working for brought about a “disastrous end” (*AFW* 192) to his nation. And it is worth noticing that he not only admitted the “flaws” (*AFW* 201) in his career, but also started to find out what true “happiness” (*AFW* 204) is: a matter very different from the “celebrations” (*ibid.*) he had experienced in the past. This time, unlike those who choose to forget, Ono acts honestly, facing the truth that he did take bold steps with courage and real faith in his career, but also that he wasted his talents, making others suffer for his mistakes. He admits that “I accept that much of what I did was ultimately harmful to our nation, that mine was part of an influence that resulted in untold suffering for our own people” (*AFW* 123). And such efforts indeed “rise above the mediocre” (*AFW* 204), and deserve to be “justified” (*ibid.*).

Unlike Ono, Stevens uses “lies” to face such truths. Through retrospection, Stevens gradually finds out that his blind obedience to Lord Darlington—as when he dismissed the two Jewish maids, and served the statesmen devotedly, and so on—does not constitute the positive contribution to humanity he had imagined it would. So he denies that he had ever worked for Darlington.¹ But this does not mean that Stevens betrayed his master. Instead, this episode marks the first time Stevens chooses not to defend Darlington in public, and the change signifies that he has started to reconsider his old beliefs, and has tried to face facts that he had been unable to face directly. Finally, Stevens admits that Darlington was “a courageous man” (*RD* 243) with “wisdom” (*ibid.*), but was “misguided” (*ibid.*), which may also be regarded as Stevens’s judgement of his own life. Teo argues that Stevens’s lies about not having worked for Darlington present an “empathetic dilemma” (Teo 35) for readers, rousing frustration

and highlighting Stevens's weakness in the reader's experience of the novel. However, as I have pointed out above, readers may view the novel from an omniscient point of view. Through Stevens's recollection, we know that he gradually realizes Darlington's and his own mistakes. But he regards his "dignity" as a cloak which can never be shed in public. So Stevens is not unwilling to admit his and his master's flaws, but he struggles to protect his own dignity when confronted with a difficult situation; in a word, he engages in self-protection. So his lies do not really sound "untrue" (*ibid.*) for readers who may understand them.

C. Lead Narrators to Attain Self-salvation

Last but not least, memory leads the narrators toward self-salvation. At the end of the novel in which he figures, Ono starts to paint again, "plants and flowers mostly" (*AFW* 199). That is to say, he pursues again the beauty of nature. Furthermore, Ono becomes more optimistic about the future, not only about his own personal life, but also about his nation. Dissenting from Drag's suggestion that the pleasure district stands for "old Japan" (Drag 43), and that Ono is addicted to "nostalgia, longing for the old order" (*ibid.*), I'd prefer to believe that since Ono has accepted his real identity, and the truth, by way of his recollection, he is ready to move on to the future; the old pleasure district serves as a starting point. We can see that in the last scene, the old pleasure district—the Migi-Hidari—turns out now to be "a front yard for a group of offices set back from the road" (*AFW* 205). And Ono regards the three young men in front of the new building as symbolizing the hope for peace and a better future for Japan, not as symbolizing militarism (as when he found the three boys playing on the

ground in the Nishizuru district in the past). Such contrasts are easily registered by the reader, who know Ono's past and present well. Even though Ono is worried about modern Japan to some extent, he is no longer so sad and frustrated; instead, he is filled with "genuine gladness" (*AFW* 206) and best wishes when he stands on the Bridge of Hesitation, which connects this area to the decadent, gloomy, dark, and lifeless scene at the beginning of the novel.

As for Stevens, he finally understands that "the evening's the best part of the day" (*RD* 244), because he has "done his day's work" (*ibid.*), and now has time to rest and rethink the *whole* "day"; recollection, in the twilight of one's life, should be the sweetest part in it, after a busy youth. Stevens is determined to "make the best of what remains of [his] day" (*ibid.*). Could it be said that his desire to learn how to make small talk is simply for the purpose of "establish[ing] [Farraday] as a figure that would guarantee the meaning of his service in the way that his former master [Darlington] did"? (*Drag* 80). If so, Stevens hasn't really benefited from memory, and remains the same mute, emotionless butler he pretended to be in the past. However, the fact is that after all the remembering, he understands what he has lost, and tries to be a real, flesh and blood man. So he freely engages in small talk and conversation, after the manner of his new American master. Though he declares it is a kind of "duty" (*RD* 245), Stevens does start to engage in genuine communication with others; he moves closer to "human warmth" (*ibid.*), no longer keeping his distance from the outside world, as he used to do. He is now like a baby, learning to walk, however clumsily at first. But readers can understand his "clumsiness," since he was a butler who'd been accustomed to older beliefs and standards of behaviour almost his entire life. This is a generosity

Stevens can be granted only in the world created by the author and the reader.

V. Conclusion

In Kazuo Ishiguro's two novels, the minor characters recreate the collective memory, especially by forgetting the past and changing their shared values, so that they may get better used to present situations. These unstable collective memories illustrate that time changes everything in a progressive way, including some negative things worthy of being noticed. At the same time, such a changing and forgetful collective memory—which also serves as a stimulation for individuals—pushes Ono and Stevens to look back and reevaluate their personal lives when their “individual memories” do not always accord with “collective memories.” So Ono and Stevens are lonely, set apart from other characters in the novel. However, individual memory fulfills positive functions in their lives. They return to the original Ono and Stevens: an ordinary man, a father, a son, a person who can love, and have faith to move ahead. Thus, it is not proper to say that “the losses invariably outweigh the remains” (Drag 39) in Ono's and Stevens's lives; rather they remain *human* in the real sense, not a tool of propaganda, not a puppet of a lord any longer.

And Kazuo Ishiguro so arranges things that readers share the characters' memories. Ono and Stevens are not lonely in this world with us readers. During the interaction with the characters, we the readers may even look into our own lives: what have *we* done in the past, what are *we* doing in the present, what should *we* do in the future? We could be Ono or Stevens; still, we might be the others at the same time. So to share the characters' stories in the novel means to better understand our own lives

in the real world.

Notes

1. Stevens denies that he has worked for Lord Darlington twice. The first time occurs on day two of his journey, at Mortimer's pond, when an old man, who used to be a colonel's batman during the war, he encounters says: "You really must be top-notch working in a place like that. Can't be many like you left, eh? . . . You mean you actually used to work for that Lord Darlington?" Stevens answers, "Oh no, I am employed by Mr John Farraday, the American gentleman who bought the house from the Darlington family" (*RD* 120). The second time also occurs on day two. Mrs Wakefield, a friend of Farraday, asks: "Stevens, what was this Lord Darlington like? Presumably you must have worked for him." Stevens replies: "I didn't, madam, no" (*RD* 123).

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